

TO: Structure committee

Summary of conversation with Chief Warren Jones
7/14/09

The conversation was excellent by Chief Jones on the state of the volunteer paid fire organizations he has been observing. Chief Jones stated that we are not alone in our struggles with these decisions and provided additional fire organizations we can also visit with that are similarly situated.

Chief Jones has been a paid Battalion Chief and now the paid Chief of Evans Fire department for the past three years since April 2006. He moved into the position after the past Chief experienced issues related to grant administration, 24/7 changes, and the hiring of additional paid staff. The organization was primarily volunteer and now has paid 24/7 coverage.

In the mid 1990's Evans was a volunteer department running about five hundred (500 calls/year), with a population of approximately five thousand (5,000) people. The budget at the time was approximately one-hundred fifty thousand (\$150,000/year). The staff consisted of a paid Fire Marshall that continues in the paid role today. As the population grew in the year 2000 to approximately ten thousand people (10,000) the staff grew to sixteen (16) paid fire firefighters, officers, and two Chiefs. The organization now runs 24/7 paid coverage with a minimum of three individuals and officer on per shift. One of the two paid Chiefs serve to be on call as needed for larger incidents at all times. Approximately ninety (90) percent of the one million five hundred fifty five thousand dollar budget per year (\$1,555,000) is spent on operations while the remaining ten (10 percent) is spent for administrative and operational costs such as equipment.

The organization had public safety techs (firefighters) primarily scheduled to provide day coverage. In 2005 and 2006 many of the volunteers were selected to become the paid staff which seems to be a common theme in combination and volunteer departments making the move to more paid organizations. The volunteers became more unwilling or unable to serve to cover nights and weekends so more paid staff was necessary. The struggles of obtaining qualified driver operators continue to be a struggle for volunteer departments. Hence he suggested an incentive proposal which I forwarded previously to the committee.

Other departments similarly situated to Foothills and recommended for review are Johnston Fire, Milliken Fire Protection District, Platteville, Cherryvale, Fort Lupton, Rifle, and Glenwood Springs. All the departments Chief Jones is aware of similarly situated to our call volume have paid Chiefs. The leanest of the organizations have 4 full time paid fire personnel and only one in Colorado has a structure similar to one we had from the previous Board with a paid administrator reporting directly to the board. I will begin to contact these departments.

Some of the typical structures for what we would be considering are a command officer on each shift, assured 24/7 coverage with as much volunteer support as possible. Gaps are covered by paid employees, include volunteer officer on nights and weekends on each shift unless a gap exists, and then paid firefighters to cover nights and weekends if needed.

The pay structure can be a challenge as to obtain the highest quality individuals the pay structure would be prohibitive as total compensation for large departments can be over one hundred thousand dollars per year. The Milliken department has a paid Chief similarly situated to ours that makes approximately sixty five to seventy thousand per year plus benefits. Being creative and structuring a plan for in district personnel may help with the costs.

The pros and cons we can expect to face are:

Pros:

- Hiring paid staff from current volunteers.
- Providing more 24/7 type coverage.
- Stronger operations and administrative accountability.
- Stronger leadership.

Cons:

- Hire many volunteers which deplete the core volunteer group.
- Typically not many apply for the role as paid Chief and those that do are typically much younger or much older than average.
- Can be difficult to get best people due to pay structure.
- A trend toward 48 hours on 96 hours off for paid shift schedules.

Recommendation by Chief Jones:

Chief Jones believes if the change is made to a paid chief it must be a **full time** position. The operational and response component are important to the organization. The remaining paid personnel should be firefighters. Administrative tasks are not as important to providing fire coverage and any administrative duties could be outsourced or completed with the paid staff. Remembering the most important role is operations then administration takes a less important and committed role.

Based upon these opinions it appears Chief Jones would be in favor of a paid Chief with an absolute minimum of at least 3 paid firefighters to run the call volume we have currently. It might be necessary to have some part time incentive compensation for volunteers to be paid for covering various shifts and acting as driver operators in order to meet the 24/7 coverage needs.

Thank You,
Patrick Smith, Board, Firefighter
Structure committee member